

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 17, 2015

PNWER Contact: Mark Stayton
(206) 443-7723 Cell: (360) 607-8173
Mark.Stayton@pnwer.org



Invasive Mussels in Montana Addressed at PNWER Meeting in Boise

BOISE, IDAHO – The threat of invasive quagga and zebra mussels in Montana was addressed by invasive species experts Thursday morning during the Invasive Species session within the Economic Leadership Forum.

The forum is an annual conference presented by the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER), a public/private non-profit chartered by five states, three provinces, and two territories in 1991.

Tests of Montana's Tiber Reservoir recently found larva of the mussels - the first time invasive mussels have been confirmed in a Pacific Northwest waterway. Similar tests of Canyon Ferry Reservoir near Helena show suspect, or inconclusive results. Both reservoirs are within in the Missouri River watershed.

During the session, Tom Boos, aquatic invasive species coordinator for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, gave an update on the situation in Montana. Boos said his organization and other Montana officials are working to come up with a strategic plan before the next boating season that will include outreach and education, containment and control.

“It’s kind of like the nightmare you never wanted to have. We’re planning for the worst and hoping for the best,” said Rep. Mike Cuffe of Montana, who has worked with PNWER for years to prevent an infestation in Montana.

Invasive species coordinators for Idaho, Alberta, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Saskatchewan also briefed the group on their jurisdictions’ efforts and best practices in 2016 to prevent a mussel infestation.

The discovery in Montana will lead to changes to Idaho’s watercraft inspection programs, said Lloyd Knight, administrator of the Division of Plant Industries at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. Knight said the state is reviewing data of watercraft coming to and from those bodies of water and will plan to focus additional resources on stations along probable routes.

Quagga and zebra mussels have spread throughout waterways across the United States and Central Canada. They are known to cause massive damage to water-based infrastructure, such as irrigation intakes and hydro-electric power facilities, and can disrupt food webs for native fish populations. A PNWER economic impact assessment estimated the cost of an invasion in Western Canada and the Pacific Northwest U.S. to be as much as \$500 million annually.

“This is a critical issue that affects recreation, agriculture, irrigation, hydropower and other industries. These mussels can completely clog water from getting through a dam,” said Sen. Lee Heider of Idaho. “When you think of the impacts of a mussel invasion, it affects the whole economy. It should be something everybody in Idaho should be concerned about.”

PNWER and its partners have helped coordinate and secure funding for mussel prevention efforts in the Pacific Northwest states and Western Canada over the last three years. In 2015, PNWER and its partners produced a Regional Framework for Perimeter Defense, which outlined the best ways states, provinces and federal border agents could prevent the spread of mussels.

Although \$4 million in federal funds were appropriated in 2015 through the Water Resources Development Act to match state spending in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington on watercraft inspection stations, states have not yet received any federal money for contracts from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“Had that money been there to help double the work being done at boat check points, the originator of these mussels might have been picked up before they were in the water,” Cuffe said.

Heider said recommendations from the Idaho Legislature’s Invasive Species Working Group included implementing infractions for boat owners who pass inspection stations and making sure owners of irrigation infrastructure are involved in the prevention effort. Heider said while Idaho and each jurisdiction must remain vigilant to stop mussels, he said PNWER has helped facilitate the sharing of effective methods to detect and prevent the spread of mussels, such as mussel-sniffing dogs being used effectively in Alberta. He said support from PNWER and its partners have helped bring states’ concerns to the national agenda.

“The more of states and provinces that are involved in this, the more impact we have, because it affects the whole region,” Heider said.

The Regional Framework for Perimeter Defense, PNWER economic impact study and more information on the mussel threat is available at <http://bit.ly/2fWxnli>.

About the Economic Leadership Forum:

More than 125 state and provincial legislators and business leaders from the Pacific Northwest and Western Canada are expected to convene at the Economic Leadership Forum, Nov. 17-18 in Boise, to discuss regional economic issues, support international trade and build cross-border cooperation.

Delegates will address pressing issues to Idaho and the region, including oil train safety and the use of drones to inspect railroads, sharing best practices in energy-efficient construction, as well as Idaho's leading practices in transportation planning, forestry and cybersecurity. Many sessions will result in plans to advance regional solutions through PNWER's active policy working groups.

For more information, visit www.pnwer.org/2016wintermeeting.

About PNWER

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a statutory public/private non-profit created in 1991 by the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

The mission of PNWER is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region; identify and promote "models of success;" and serve as a conduit to exchange information.